**Chinese Lantern Festival**

**History**

The 15th day of the 1st lunar month is the Chinese Lantern Festival because the first lunar month is called yuan-month and in the ancient times people called night Xiao. The 15th day is the first night to see a full moon. So the day is also called [Yuan Xiao Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuan_Xiao_Festival) in China. According to the Chinese tradition, at the very beginning of a new year, when there is a bright full moon hanging in the sky, there should be thousands of colorful lanterns hung out for people to appreciate.

**Earliest origins**

There are many different beliefs about the origin of the Lantern Festival. But one thing for sure is that it had something to do with celebrating and cultivating positive relationship between people, families, nature and the higher beings they believed were responsible for bringing/returning the light each year.

The common legend dealing with the origins of the Lantern Festival speaks of a beautiful bird that flew down to earth from heaven, which was hunted and killed by some villagers. This angered the Jade Emperor in Heaven because the bird was his favorite one. Therefore, he planned a storm of fire to destroy the village on the 15th lunar day. The Jade Emperor's daughter heard of this plan, and warned the villagers of her father’s plan to destroy their village. The village was in turmoil because nobody knew how they should escape their imminent destruction. However, a wise man from another village suggested that every family should hang red lanterns around their houses, set up bonfires on the streets, and explode firecrackers on the 14th, 15th, and 16th lunar days. This would give the village the appearance of being on fire to the Jade Emperor. On the 15th lunar day, troops sent down from heaven whose mission was to destroy the village saw that the village was already ablaze, and returned to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor. Satisfied, the Jade Emperor decided not to burn down the village. From that day on, people celebrate the anniversary on the 15th lunar day every year by carrying red lanterns on the streets and exploding firecrackers and fireworks.

Those who do not carry lanterns often enjoy watching informal lantern parades. In addition to eating [*tangyuan*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangyuan)*,* another activity at this festival is guessing lantern riddles which became part of the festival during the [Tang Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_Dynasty). These riddles contained messages of good fortune.